

## Peace Wapiti School Division Processes Regarding Bus Cancellations

While our roads have been fairly good so far this year, we all know when living in northern Alberta it is only a matter of time before we have to close some bus routes due to poor road conditions. The purpose of this article is to give our parents some insight into how we reach the decision to cancel a bus route.

### **How do we reach a decision to close down all/or any of our District bus routes?**

During times of inclement weather, the Director of Transportation in the southern area of Peace Wapiti School Division, and a Transportation Supervisor located in the northern area of Peace Wapiti are on call. Between 4:00 a.m. and 4:30 a.m. they are in contact with a local highway maintenance company. If they feel possible road issues are developing in their area, these employees are on the road by 4:30 a.m. and over the course of the next two hours, they drive across Peace Wapiti School District on primary and secondary highways. They discuss the road conditions with the maintenance contractors in their area to identify road concerns. They cover approximately 150 to 200 kilometers each and during this time will perform braking tests etc to determine skid conditions. Our first concern is our primary highways as they have the highest levels of traffic and thus the greatest potential for bringing serious harm to our students. At about 6:00 a.m. the Director of transportation will contact the Superintendent to discuss the road conditions and at that time a decision to close down all District buses or just buses within a certain area of the District is made. Once this decision is made, local radio stations are contacted. However, the reality is our District is the size of Wales (five times the size of PEI). It is very possible that we will have acceptable roads in one area and unacceptable roads in another area. It is for that reason each bus driver has the authority to cancel his/her route.

### **How does a bus driver reach a decision to close down his/her bus routes?**

Each bus driver has the authority to close down his/her route. The bus driver will make a reasonable attempt to run their route but if after such an attempt, they feel that road conditions are unsafe, they will cancel their route. In doing so, they will notify the Director of Transportation so that local radio stations are notified and they will also make reasonable attempts to contact the parents of the students who ride their bus. It is for this reason that current phone numbers are essential. In the event that our bus drivers are unable to contact the parents of a small child they will take the necessary steps to ensure that the child is not left unsupervised. Our bus drivers are dedicated employees who believe in the value of our schools and the safety of students. If they have chosen to shut down their route, it will be with good reason. Please work with us to support them in a very difficult decision.

### **What if the parent feels the route is unsafe?**

Peace Wapiti leaves the final say to the parent regarding whether their child rides a bus during times of inclement weather. Should a parent feel that their area of a bus route is unacceptable, then they are free to decide not to place their child on the bus. We would ask that should the parent make such a decision, that they contact our Bus Shop at 532-7734 so that the driver is made aware of the road conditions in your area and the change in the route.

In addition to the above process, Peace Wapiti School Division #76 buses will not be stopping to pick up students on primary or secondary highways when weather conditions such as heavy fog have created a situation of limited or no visibility. The decision not to stop will be left to the driver's discretion. Should the bus driver decide not to stop parents will be notified via phone that the bus will not be picking up students that morning. Parents are encouraged to phone

their bus driver or the Transportation Department (532-7734) if they feel weather conditions have made their stop dangerous.

For bus cancellations due to inclement weather or temperature, Peace Wapiti School Division is now divided into 6 zones based on High School attendance areas. All buses associated with a High School attendance area would be cancelled at the same time. One or all of the zones could be cancelled at any one time. Parents would need to know which High School their Elementary School is associated with in order to know if the buses in their area are cancelled. For example: Beaverlodge High School attendance area would include Wembley Schools, Elmworth School, and Hythe School. Please check the inclement weather policy on the Peace Wapiti School Division website for a list of High School attendance areas and their associated schools. You can find the weather stations we use by going to our webpage and checking the quicklinks at the top. Cancellations will be announced on the local radio stations.

Finally, according to the American National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, school buses are nearly eight times safer than passenger vehicles. Our school buses are constructed far stronger than a family passenger vehicle and are driven by professional drivers, often with years of experience. They are the safest way to get a child to school; please work with us to keep them that way.